

LIVING HISTORY



I was both nervous and excited to be among the five black students to integrate the all-white Sacred Heart School in Biloxi, Miss. I knew that black children in other cities had been physically assaulted for integrating, but it had been my dream to play in the Sacred Heart marching band. My attempts to perform in the band initiated

taunts and verbal intimidation and I was made to stand to the side. One day, a few of the other band members retrieved me from my usual spot to the side to join them in the band prayer. On that day, I finally felt accepted and I believe they finally overcame their fears. We all benefited. *Brown* made it possible for the nation to realize that when taught together, all children prosper.

— SACRAMENTO ATTORNEY WINDIE SCOTT

Brown v. Board of Education officially changed the nation's interpretation of equality in every respect. It related only to education but it triggered Rosa Parks in her 1955 decision not to move on that bus. *Brown* triggered the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and all those who started to demonstrate. *Brown* triggered the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King. All of a sudden, around the country, people who had been shackled by so-called 'separate but equal' no longer had to adhere to it.

— FORMER SAN FRANCISCO MAYOR WILLIE BROWN



It was a monumental decision in that it validated what so many of us had felt for so very long – that separate wasn't equal. It validated our sense of injustice. It was the beginning of change.

— ALAMEDA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE BRENDA HARBIN-FORTE

To learn more about *Brown v. Board of Education*, visit these Web sites:

- pbs.org/jefferson/enlight/brown
- landmarkcases.org/brown
- npr.org/news/specials/brown50
- ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/brownvboard50th



Thurgood Marshall, (center) and the NAACP team that argued the *Brown v. Board of Education* case.



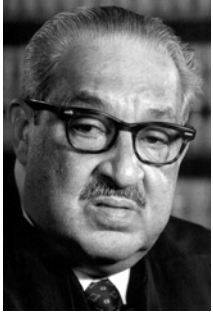
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BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION



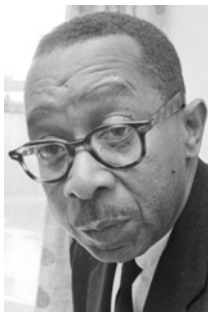
**A LANDMARK RULING
IN THE STRUGGLE
FOR EQUALITY**

KEY PLAYERS



THURGOOD MARSHALL was the legal director of the NAACP from 1940-1961 and the attorney who successfully argued the *Brown* case at the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1967, Marshall became the first black person appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Marshall is considered one of the most important figures of the civil rights movement and one of the greatest lawyers ever to argue before the Supreme Court.

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN was appointed Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court just weeks before the second round of oral arguments in the *Brown* case was to take place. Warren was a well-known consensus builder. And unlike the previous Chief Justice, Fred Vincent, Warren seemed determined to rule in favor of the plaintiffs. He worked carefully with the other justices in order to ensure that the opinion would be unanimous. And it was.



DR. KENNETH CLARK was one of the most highly regarded black social scientists in the United States. He is most famous for what became known as the “doll tests.” Using white and black dolls, he asked children to indicate which was good and which was bad. A majority of the children preferred the white doll. The court agreed that there was indisputable evidence of the negative effects of racism on the personality and psychological development of black children.

THE STORY OF *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*

For many years prior to 1954, black children in many cities and states were not allowed to go to school with white children. Even though the law said they were to be provided equal facilities, the schools most black children attended were far inferior. They had substandard facilities, no basic school supplies and out-of-date textbooks and were often located far from where the students lived.

In Topeka, Kansas, a black third-grader named Linda Brown had to walk a mile through a railroad switchyard to get to her school when a whites-only school was only seven blocks from her home. Linda's father tried to enroll her in the whites-only school but the principal refused. Linda and her father visited with lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who filed a lawsuit to integrate Topeka schools. The suit was called *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

Linda and her lawyers lost their case in Topeka, and appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Lawsuits similar to Linda's had also been filed in South Carolina, Delaware, Virginia and the District of Columbia. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear *Brown v. Board of Education* and combined it with the cases in the other states.



The U.S. Supreme Court considered all the evidence in the cases, including testimony from social scientists like Dr. Kenneth Clark. Clark presented to the court indisputable evidence of the negative effects of racism on the personalities and psychological development of black children.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it had reached a unanimous decision. Chief Justice Earl Warren read the court's opinion from the bench, emphasizing this key finding: “[I]n the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

Linda Brown and the other plaintiffs had won their case and made history. The U.S. Supreme Court ordered that all schools in America be desegregated. As they would learn, full desegregation would take many years and involve further struggle, but the legal battle had been fought and won.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision did not abolish segregation in public places such as parks and restaurants. But by prohibiting segregation in public schools, the court and the nation took a giant step forward in the struggle for civil rights and equal protection under the law as required by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The *Brown* decision inspired many black men and women to become lawyers. These men and women continue to fight for justice and create change through their successes in the California and United States judicial systems.